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AUTHOR Opuni, Kwame A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The 1990 Beating the Odds (BTO) Summer School was an intensive instructional, counseling, and guidance program sponsored by the Houston (Texas) Independent School District for a group of at-risk students in grades 5-9. The program was designed to provide a supportive and nurturing learning environment in which the academic and sociopsychological deficiencies of program students could be addressed, thereby giving them the competence and determination to stay in school. This report evaluates the effectiveness of the program in improving student self-esteem, appreciation of teachers, confidence to improve grades, and the determination to succeed in school. The report describes implementation activities of the program; assesses its strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness; and synthesizes recommendations of program staff and students for enhancing program effectiveness. The evaluation answers research questions involving the following areas and issues: (1) curriculum content of the program; (2) staff perception of factors limiting academic performance; (3) staff perception of staff training effectiveness; (4) student attendance rates; (5) perceived strengths among program characteristics; (6) perceived weaknesses among program characteristics; (7) program impact on student self-esteem and attitudes toward school; and (8) staff and student recommendations for program improvement. Statistical data are presented in two figures and one table. A list of seven references is appended. (AF)

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Beating the Odds Summer School: A Dropout Prevention Program for At-Risk Students (1990)

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Houston Independent School District
Department of Research & Evaluation

Opuni, Kwame A., Ph.D.
Tullis, Richard, Ed.D.
Sanchez, Kathryn S., Ed.D.

CG 027 893

HISD

Joan M. Raymond
General Superintendent

THE BEATING THE ODDS SUMMER SCHOOL: A DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS (1990)

The 1990 Beating The Odds (BTO) Summer School was an intensive instructional, counseling, and guidance program for a group of at-risk students in grades 5-9. The program was designed to provide a supportive and nurturing learning environment in which the academic and socio-psychological deficiencies of program students could be addressed, thereby giving them the competence and determination to stay in school. This report evaluates the effectiveness of the program in improving student self esteem, appreciation of teachers, confidence to improve grades, and the determination to succeed in school. It also synthesizes the recommendations of the staff for refining the program. The program was effective in achieving its objectives.

INTRODUCTION

The search for strategies to help curb the high dropout rates among the nation's high school students has been on the agendas of urban school districts for many years. In the wake of this national preoccupation, exploratory programs have been implemented by many school districts to ensure that potential dropouts stay in school. Examples of such efforts include Houston's Project Strive (Opuni, Goebel, & Sanchez, 1989), Boston's Compact (Hargroves, 1987), Buffalo's Project AIM and Project SMART, Hartford's Project Bridge, New York City's Project SOAR, and Cleveland's "Scholarships in Escrow" (OERI, Department of Education, 1987).

In the continuing search for innovative and effective ways to address the needs of at-risk students, the Houston Independent School District implemented the Beating The Odds (BTO) Program in 1988-89 as a dropout prevention program. The program was implemented under the provisions of the federal government's Dropout Demonstration Assistance program. The BTO program was designed to operate during the regular school year and provide specialized training for teachers of at-risk students. Further, the program was to provide cross-age tutoring, mentorship support, counseling, and guidance support services for at-risk students.

A supplement to the regular school year BTO program was the BTO Summer School, a four-week intensive academic, counseling, and guidance program for a selected group of at-risk students during the summer of 1990. It is the evaluation of the BTO Summer School that is presented in this report.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Purpose: The BTO Summer School was designed to provide a supportive and nurturing learning environment in which the academic deficiencies of program students could be addressed, thereby giving the students the competence and determination to stay in school during the years ahead. The BTO School was implemented between June 13, 1990 and July 13, 1990.

Roles of Program Staff: The BTO Summer School staff included forty teachers, eight educational diagnosticians, four psychologists, five psychological interns, four social workers, and thirty student tutors. The teachers provided individualized and group instruction in math and language for the students. The diagnosticians organized and supervised the delivery of program services on each campus. They assisted with the resolution of disciplinary problems and conducted inservices for teachers on learning styles, behavior modification and class management techniques. They helped to procure pertinent instructional and other curriculum materials for the staff. Additionally, they organized field-trips, field-day activities, and award ceremonies. The psychologists, psychological interns, and social workers provided guidance and counseling services for the students and sometimes their parents. The student tutors were high school at-risk students who had been trained to provide individualized tutoring for the program students. They also assisted the program teachers in the preparation of instructional materials.

Curriculum: The curriculum was developed to match the students' academic and socio-psychological deficiencies. Areas of instruction included the following: math, language arts, and study skills. Guidance and counseling services were provided for the BTO students in relation to their individual or group needs. Several motivational or incentive strategies were adopted to help boost student interest in learning and staying in school. Lastly, there were field trips to several enriching and fun places.[1]

Number Served: The 1990 BTO Summer School served 774 at-risk students in grades five through nine. The criteria for selecting the program students included the following: (a) retained one or more times and still unable to master the essential elements of the curriculum, (b) is one or more years below grade level in language, reading, or math skills, or (c) performs below the 35th percentile on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (6th Edition). Priority was given to students whose placement in 1990-91 would be in 6th or 9th grade.

Program Cost: The cost[2] of the BTO Summer School was $278,356. Of this amount, Chapter 2 program provided $202,958 (73%), Dropout Demonstration Assistance program provided $66,844 (24%), while the district provided $8,557 (3%). The following is the breakdown of the total cost: staff salaries, $170,449; staff training, $32,857; instructional materials and supplies, $12,000; transportation, $29,050; snacks, $34,600; and incentives, $6,000. In effect, the total program cost per student was $359.

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[1] A more thorough description of the curriculum is provided in the response to Research Question 1, on page 5.

[2] Source: Budgeting and Planning Department, Houston Independent School District, (October 3, 1990).

DESIGN OF THE INQUIRY

The specific tasks of this inquiry were to:

- describe the implementation activities of the BTO Summer School;
- assess the strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness of the BTO Summer School; and
- synthesize the recommendations of program staff and students for enhancing the effectiveness of the program.

This program evaluation answers the following research questions:

1. What was the content of the BTO Summer School curriculum?
2. What did the BTO staff perceive to be the most critical factors limiting the academic performance of the students with whom they worked?
3. What were the perceptions of the staff about the effectiveness of the staff training activities?
4. What were the class attendance rates of students on the various campuses?
5. Which program characteristics were perceived by the program staff or students to be the major strengths of the 1990 BTO Summer School?
6. Which program characteristics were perceived by the program staff or students to be the major weaknesses or problems of the 1990 BTO Summer School?
7. What was the impact of the BTO Summer School on student self-esteem and attitudes toward school?
8. What were the recommendations of the program staff and students for improving the BTO program?

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The total student enrollment in the program was 774. The enrollment figures at the respective host campuses were as follows: Jackson Middle, 99; Jones High, 124; Edison Middle, 65; Attucks Middle, 66; Milby High, 121; Lamar High, 129; Waltrip High, 76; and Kashmere High, 94.

Procedure: The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale was used to assess the impact of the program on students' self concept. The following five questionnaire surveys were also developed and administered to evaluate various aspects of the program.

- *BTO Teacher Survey*
  The domains of interest were: (a) teacher assessment of the effectiveness of the staff training activities, (b) major program strengths and weaknesses, and (c) recommendations for resolving the weaknesses in the program.
- *BTO Student Survey*
  The major domains of interest were: (a) student assessment of the effectiveness of various aspects of the program's implementation, and (b) impact of the program on their self-esteem and attitudes toward learning, and (c) recommendations for improving the program.
- *BTO Educational Diagnostician Survey*
  The domains of interest were: (a) major strengths and weaknesses of the program; and (b) recommendations for resolving the weaknesses.
- *BTO Student Tutor Survey*
  The domain of interest was their assessment of the impact of the program on their attitudes towards learning and themselves.
- *BTO Social Worker/Psychologist/Counselor Survey*
  The domains of interest were: (a) their assessment of the effectiveness of the staff training activities; (b) major strengths and weaknesses of the program; and (c) recommendations for resolving the weaknesses.

Data Analysis: A matched Pairs "t" test was performed using a pretest-posttest design with the subscales of the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* as dependent measures. Descriptive analysis of the following program attributes are also presented: staff training activities; student attendance rates; the impact of the program on student attitudes towards learning and themselves; program strengths and weaknesses; and program personnel recommendations for the BTO program.

Limitations of the Study: This report is primarily a formative evaluation. Therefore, it was intended to provide an assessment of program implementation effectiveness. However, an effort was made to assess the impact of the program on student attitudes toward a number of critically important academic performance variables such as student self-esteem and determination to succeed in school. There was no assessment of project impact on student performance in either math or language arts. A convenience sample of 421 (54%) out of 770 program students responded to the BTO Student Survey. Statistical analysis of the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* pretest-posttest data was limited by the fact that only 178 (23% of student enrollment) had both pre- and post-test scores. However, many more had either the pre-test or the post-test scores only.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What was the content of the BTO Summer School curriculum?

BTO students were tested at the beginning of the program to help identify the critical academic deficiency areas of individual students. The curriculum was then tailored to fit their respective needs. The following are descriptions of the various segments of the BTO Summer school curriculum.

Content Area Instruction: Topics that were covered on the various campuses included the following:

Math: The topics included whole numbers & fractions (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division), multi-tables, place value, long division, and other math concepts.

Language Arts: The topics included main idea, oral and silent reading skills, creative writing and composition, logical thinking skills, methods for scanning, mapping and outlining information, and newspaper publishing.

Study Skills: Strategies for developing practical work study habits were explored.

Psychological Support: Topics covered during individual and group guidance and counseling sessions included anger, frustration, depression, drugs, parent and child relationships, self-esteem building and substance abuse, popularity and success. Special emphasis was placed on the needs of students who had difficulty adjusting to the school environment. Additionally, videos on career planning, and drugs and feelings were shown and discussed in Attucks Middle School.

Motivational (Incentive) Activities: The Cool Bucks program was organized to help boost student interest in the program. In the Cool Bucks program, students were rewarded with dollar coupons for attending classes, outstanding participation in activities, and academic and attitudinal improvement. The coupons were later redeemed at the school's BTO store for school materials purchased with program funds or items donated by the program staff. In Kashmere High, for example, the depletion of the store's limited inventory, was replenished with staff donations such as T-shirts, sunglasses, posters, Astroworld tickets, and home-prepared foods (nachos, hot dogs, frito pies, sodas, etc.). Astroworld tickets were given to thirty-one students at Jackson Middle with perfect attendance records. Furthermore, guest speakers were invited from the community to give presentations on topics such as (a) the importance of staying in school (Jones High) and (b) AIDS (Edison Middle).

Other Incentive and Enrichment Activities: Field-trips were made to several places of historical, scientific, and recreational importance. Examples of such places were the Museum of Natural Science, Mercer Arboretum, Museum of Printing History, City Hall, SUMMIT, and the Family Law Center. Attucks Middle School provided a performance by the African Folk Tale group. Lastly, all of the schools organized graduation and awards ceremonies at the end of the program.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What did the BTO staff perceive to be the most critical factors limiting the academic performance of the students with whom they worked?

The BTO Summer School staff of educational diagnosticians, social workers, teachers and psychologists were asked to reflect on their experiences with the program students and indicate what they perceived to be the most important factors that seemed to be limiting the academic performance of the students with whom they worked. Their responses were deemed important since they provide a reinforcing credence to the appropriateness of the BTO School in meeting the needs of the program students.

The following were the factors or characteristics mentioned by eleven or more staff members of the program.

- Students were unmotivated and seemed to lack interest in learning (n=20).
- Students were deficient in self-esteem and self-confidence, and needed lots of hugs, smiles, praises, rubs on the arms and backs, and someone to talk to (n=15).
- Students were disruptive, lacked self-discipline and respect for authority, were deficient in social skills such as politeness, and periodically cursed even though they usually added "excuse me" to such statements (n=11).
- Students appeared to have homes not conducive to learning (n=11).

The following were the factors or characteristics mentioned by three to eight staff members of the program.

- The students had short on-task attention spans, were easily distracted and seemed to have many personal problems (n=8).
- Students seemed to lack individualized academic, guidance, and counseling programs in the regular curriculum that are commensurate with their unique needs (n=7).
- Students had excessive numbers of absences from class (n=5).
- Students lacked high expectations from significant adults or role models in their lifes who valued education (n=4).
- Students had deficient reading skills (n=4).
- Students portrayed an impression that teachers in the regular school year were either unknowledgeable about their special needs and deficiencies, or insensitive to their needs and well-being (n=3).
- The students seemed unable to set short or long range career or educational goals (n=3).

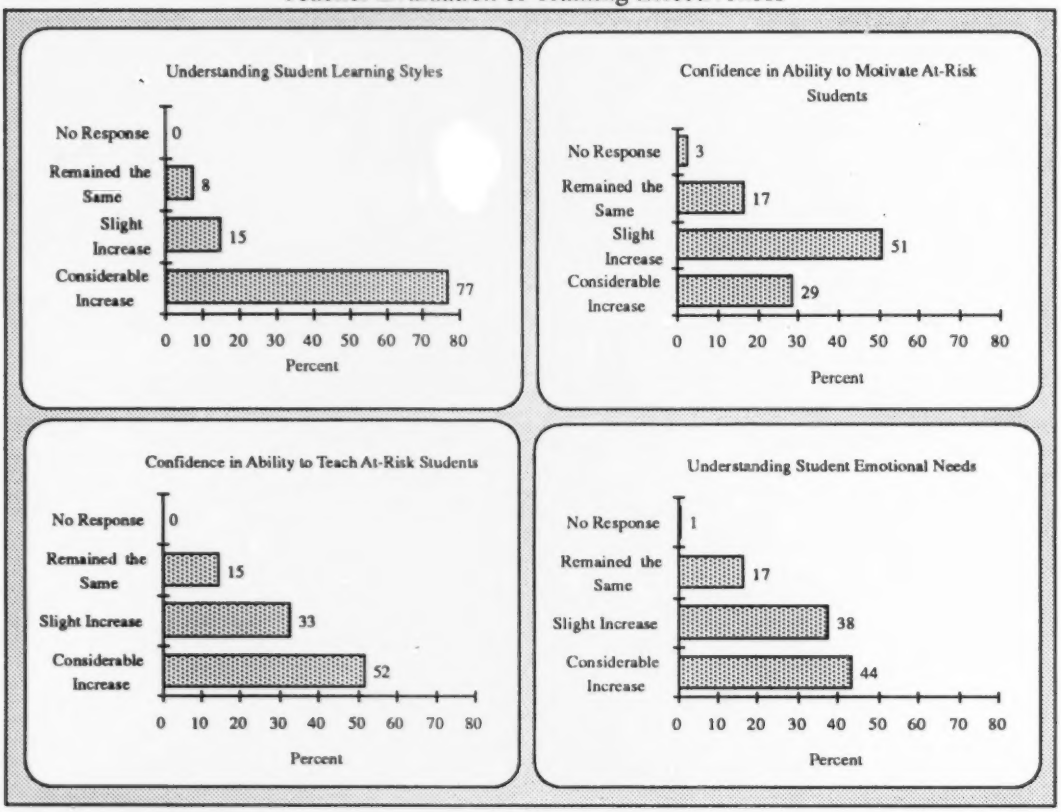
The following were the factors or characteristics mentioned by fewer than three staff members of the program:

- Students do not seem to value education (n=2);
- Students are deficient in study skills (n=2);

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What were the perceptions of the staff about the effectiveness of the staff training activities?

Figure 1
Teacher Evaluation of Training Effectiveness



Program Teachers

As shown on Figure 1, the teachers perceived the inservices as effective in increasing (a) the confidence in their abilities to motivate and effectively teach at-risk students, and (b) their knowledge about the learning styles and emotional needs of at-risk students. Overall, 85% of the staff indicated that staff training activities were effective in preparing them for their respective assignments. Furthermore, 85% of the teachers indicated that their ability to increase students' instructional time-on-task was improved by the training activities.

Guidance and Counseling Staff

Comments of the social workers, psychologists and counselors indicated that the inservices did not adequately address their needs nor those of the student tutors. They mentioned that the training did not provide them with adequate preparation in various aspects of Hispanic and Black culture, how to handle disciplinary problems, and how to involve parents of such at-risk students.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What were the class attendance rates of students on the various campuses?

Table 1
Mean Attendance Rates[3]
By Program School

Program School	Enrollment	Attendance Rate	% With Perfect Attendance
Attucks Middle	66	70%	9% (n=6)
Edison Middle	65	71%	17% (n=11)
Jackson Middle	99	88%	31% (n=31)
Milby Senior High	121	*	*
Kashmere Senior High	94	72%	20% (n=20)
Waltrip Senior High	76	73%	23% (n=18)
Jones Senior High	124	65%	10% (n=12)
Lamar Senior High	129	80%	17% (n=23)

* The format in which data was submitted did not facilitate the calculation of this figure.

Observations:

- The highest attendance rate was at Jackson Middle (88%), while the lowest was at Jones High (65%).
- The percent of students with perfect attendance was highest at Jackson Middle (31%) where about one third of the students had perfect attendance.
- A close examination of the attendance rosters indicated that several students missed a few days because of their late enrollment in the program, while many dropped out or withdrew from the program for a number of reasons, including trips out of town for the holidays.

[3] On the basis of the 22 days that the program sites were open (June 13—July 13, 1990), the attendance rate of each student was assessed. In effect, the days that a student missed for late enrollment or withdrawing from the program were counted as absences.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5

Which program characteristics were perceived by the program staff and students to be the major strengths of the 1990 BTO Summer School?

Program Atmosphere and Emotional Support

- The atmosphere was described by 18 staff members as caring, emotionally supportive and depicted a sense of family. In the words of one teacher, "The atmosphere was that of a small school, where the teachers knew all of the students and the students knew all of the teachers." Another teacher also remarked "They [the students] realized that teachers can really be on their side."
- 67% of the students indicated that the teachers showed that they cared considerably about the students' success; 46% of the students assessed the help they received from the psychologists/counselors/social workers as considerably effective.

Instruction:

- The individualized or small group instruction in math and language was perceived by seventeen staff members as a major strength of the program.
- 67% of the program students described the way the teachers taught math as considerably effective, while an additional 25% percent described the math teaching strategies as slightly effective.
- 61% of the students indicated that the strategies used for teaching language arts were considerably effective. They were supported by 25% of the students who assessed the language arts strategies as slightly effective.

Incentive Program:

- Twelve staff members described the Cool Bucks incentive program and the Astroworld tickets as very effective.
- 53% of the students assessed the Cool Bucks program as considerably effective in stimulating their interest in the BTO Summer School. An additional 32% of the students regarded the Cool Bucks program as slightly effective.

Character Education & Guidance:

Six counselors indicated that the emphasis on guidance and counseling provided an opportunity for the students to know who they are and what they are capable of accomplishing.

Staff Inservices:

The staff training activities, especially Hand-In-Hand, Learning Styles, and discussions of the emotional needs of at-risk students, were deemed as the cornerstones of the program by staff members.

Student Tutors:

According to one educational diagnostician, the cross-age tutoring component was *"the crowning achievement of the Beating The Odds project. I am convinced that the tutors have gained significantly from their experiences in both their training sessions and in actually tutoring the students"*. Forty four percent of the program students who were surveyed assessed the help they received from their tutors as considerably effective. Additionally, 63% of the tutors who responded to the BTO Tutor Survey (50% return rate) indicated that their participation in the program had considerably improved their self-esteem.

RESEARCH QUESTION 6

Which program characteristics were perceived by the program staff and students to be the major weaknesses of the 1990 BTO Summer School?

Staff Selection, Inservices & Assignments

It was the observation of three teachers that some of the teachers were not properly screened when they were hired. Furthermore, the late hiring of a number of teachers and the fact that some staff members did not attend the staff inservices adversely affected program effectiveness. In their view, those teachers were not adequately experienced or trained to effectively work with the type of students who were in the program. Additionally, some of the teachers indicated that they were assigned to content areas that they least preferred to teach.

Staff Cooperation

Thirteen percent of the staff indicated that the program did not provide for informal meetings that could have facilitated more effective collaborative and cohesive working relationships that were needed. They indicated that it was just when they were beginning to get to know each other and share ideas for helping the students that the program ended.

Program Organization

- The request for student identification numbers after the program had started, produced unnecessary instructional interruptions.
- According to eight staff members, the four-week length of the program was not adequate to enable the program to make a lasting impact on the kind of students who were in the program.
- Some teachers indicated that the forty-minute length of their classes was too short to be able to help all of the students in their classes.
- Teachers complained about pay checks that were late and student tutors who did not receive any pay checks during the entire four weeks. According to some teachers, this problem adversely affected the motivation of the student tutors.
- A few teachers expressed the concern that there was a lack of visitation or emotional support from the central or district office; one stated that there was not even a phone call.
- One teacher indicated that the time for students to board buses in order to get to classes at 8:00 a.m. was too early for a summer program.
- Another teacher mentioned that the BTO program should not have immediately followed the spring semester. It was felt that the exhaustion from the spring semester should have been given some time to dissipate before the commencement of the program.
- A number of the staff expressed the view that feedback communication from the staff at the sites to the program coordinators was somewhat deficient.
- Many counselors indicated that there was not the space, privacy and time to provide the critical one-on-one counseling that many students needed, possibly daily. In their view, many of these emotionally insecure students had such personal problems that could not be discussed in group sessions.

Instructional Resources

Thirty percent of the teachers indicated that there was a lack of an adequate supply of math manipulatives and other math materials. Some teachers indicated that this shortage of materials limited their effectiveness. A few expressed that they were disappointed when they realized that the math materials used during the inservices were not available for regular teaching assignments. For instance, at Waltrip High, the educational diagnostician had to use her personal funds to purchase some math materials for her teachers to ensure that everything proceeded smoothly. Three teachers also mentioned that the distribution of other instructional materials to the program schools at the beginning of the program was inefficient. A few teachers expressed the concern that access to instructional equipment of the site schools such as xerox machines, audio visuals, and computers was limited or non-existent. They pointed out that non-traditional instructional strategies were called for in order to sustain the attention and interest of BTO students. The lack of instructional materials such as film strips, movies, and other audio visuals was perceived to be a major weakness of the program.

Student Enrollment Timelines

The number of pre-registered students at the beginning of the program was low. Some teachers blamed the principals of the students' home schools for being so pre-occupied with other programs that the BTO Summer School pre-registration was not given adequate attention. Furthermore, the fact that there was no enrollment cut-off date enabled students to enter the program throughout the duration of the program. Such a policy was regarded by some members of staff as detrimental to the effective operation of the program.

Student Discipline Management

Twelve percent of the program staff expressed that they were not informed of administrative policies and procedures for handling disciplinary problems and transportation contracts before the program started. Several staff members indicated that there were too many discipline problems.

Student Motivation

Twenty percent of the staff indicated that materials for the Cool Bucks stores were in short supply and had to be supplemented with donations from the staff. Three teachers further expressed that the incentives that were supplied were not appropriate for the ages of the program students. A number of the staff indicated that many of the students were usually hungry and needed sandwiches rather than the kind of snacks they were given.

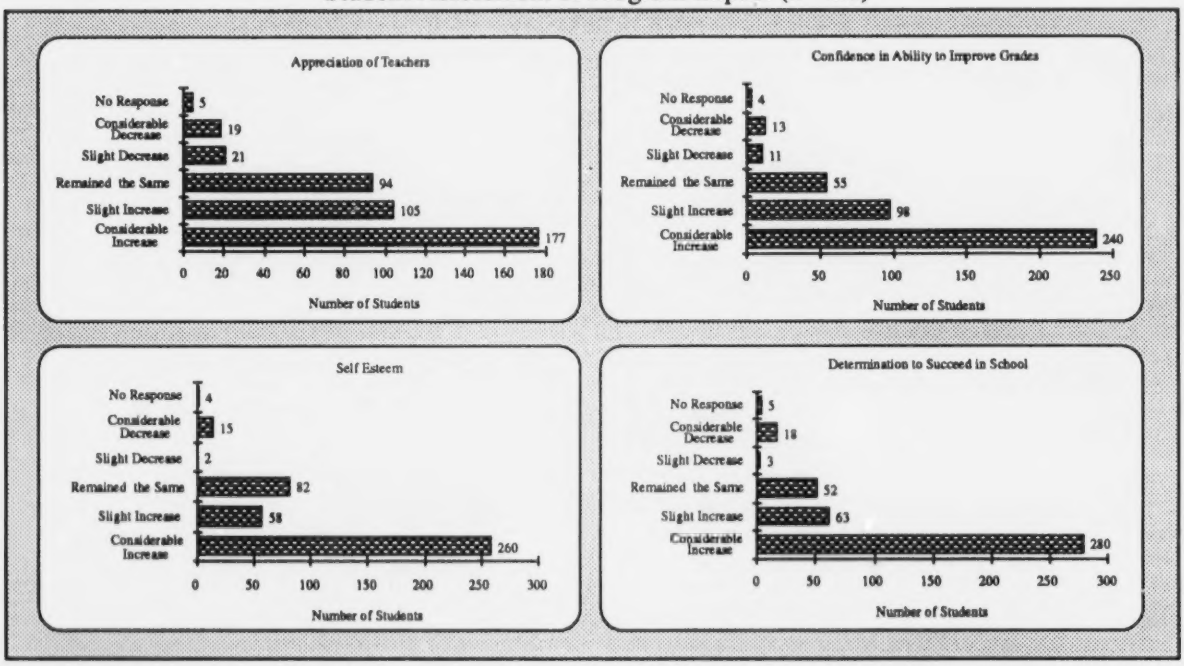
Parental Involvement

Several staff members mentioned that the failure of many parents to get involved in the program, in-spite of their several invitations to them, was a major weakness. One teacher explained that most of the parents had to go to work and could not afford to attend the program activities.

RESEARCH QUESTION 7

What was the impact of the BTO Summer School on student self-esteem, and attitudes toward school.

Figure 2
Student Assessment of Program Impact (n=421)



Observations:

- Of the 282 students who indicated that the program had improved their *appreciation of their teachers*, 59% assessed the increase as considerable.
- Of the 338 students who indicated that the program had improved their *confidence in their ability to improve their grades*, 71% assessed the increase in their confidence as considerable.
- Of the 318 students who indicated that the program had improved their *self esteem*, 81% (n=260) assessed the increase in their *self-esteem* as considerable.
- Of the 343 program students who indicated that the program had instilled in them the *determination to succeed in school*, 81% (n=280) assessed the change as considerable.

The *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale*, was administered to a convenience sample of 178 program students during the second week (pre-test) and final week (post-test) of the program. Results indicated an improvement in the self concept of the students tested. However, the improvement was not statistically significant ("t"= 1.496; N.S.). Furthermore, the scores for the Physical Appearance and Attributes sub-scale showed a statistically significant improvement ("t "= 3.007; P<.001).

RESEARCH QUESTION 8

What were the recommendations of the program staff and students for improving the BTO program?

One of the goals of this demonstration project was to help develop a model summer program that can be replicated within or outside the district. As a result, an effort was made to solicit recommendations from the program staff for refining the program.[4] Even if the program is not being repeated in the summer of 1991, the recommendations could be used as the ingredients for other summer programs for at-risk students. It is certain that the search for better and more effective strategies for addressing the dropout problem will continue to preoccupy the attention of our educational leaders during the years ahead. The following are brief descriptions of the recommendations proposed by the BTO staff for improving the major component areas of the program:

Program Staff

***Selection*:** Program teachers should be thoroughly screened and hired in the early part of spring. Only experienced and motivated teachers who have the competence and willingness to work effectively with the at-risk student should be selected.

Inservices: All program teachers should attend the staff inservices that precede the BTO Summer program. Training should provide adequate emphasis on discipline and behavior management, step-by-step solutions, learning styles, cultural attitudes and values of at-risk students, and self-esteem building strategies. The staff should be advised of administrative policies pertaining to the handling of discipline problems during the BTO Summer school.

Assignments: Teacher assignment should be in the areas of their competence and preference.

Number of Staff: For many at-risk students it takes only one-on-one to get them to open up. In effect, more social workers/counselors/psychologists should be hired to enable the program staff to give the students the maximum assistance. Appropriate space and facilities should also be provided to facilitate the provision of privacy. More teachers should be hired to reduce the class sizes to a maximum of between five and ten students to ensure an effective resolution of the academic deficiencies of the BTO students. Additionally, each class period should be lengthened from 45 minutes to a minimum of 55 minutes.

Cooperation: Each school staff of teachers, counselors, social workers, and psychologists should be trained together as a group. If this arrangement is not feasible, then at least the staff of each program school should have the opportunity for informal get-acquainted sessions, separate from the larger group. Such an approach will help enhance team spirit, common sense of purpose, effective collaborative and cohesive working relationships, and understanding among the staff of each program school before the program starts in the summer.

Parental Involvement

Parent meetings should be scheduled before the program starts or during the early part of the first week. Funds should be provided for refreshments for parents. Child care services should be provided during the meeting. There should be mandatory parental involvement or contracts for truant or behavioral problem students.

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[4] At the time when the survey data were collected neither the researcher nor the program staff knew that there was not going to be a BTO summer school in 1991.

Program Students

Background: Teachers should have background information on each student. Areas that need to be covered include: discipline records, attendance records, academic performance, and home situation. This account could be put together by the social worker or counselor and shared with the teachers.

Report cards: Report cards of the students should indicate promotions, retentions, etc. They should be provided at least one week before the program starts.

Recruitment & Enrollment Timelines: The principals of the target schools should help in identifying program-eligible students so that enrollment in the program is completed before the school year ends. The principals and the BTO staff should help to obtain student identification numbers when the students enroll. The enrollment cut-off date should be the end of the first week so that program students can receive at least three weeks of help before the program ends.

Motivation: Adequate supplies of age-appropriate incentive materials for the Cool Bucks stores should be provided. Program administrators should explore the financial feasibility of providing sandwiches for the students as a substitute for the snacks.

Program Organization and Leadership

- Adequate supply of math, language arts, guidance and counseling materials such as film strips, manipulatives, and movies should be supplied before the commencement of the program or when needed. Access to instructional equipment of the site schools such as xerox machines, audio visual materials, and computers should also be available for staff use.

- The possibility of increasing the four-week length of the program should be explored, in an effort to help provide a more long-lasting academic and socio-psychological impact on the students.

- Students should have mentors and student tutors during the school year.

- Pay checks for the staff should be distributed on time.

- Central and district office administrative leaders should provide more emotional support for the program staff who are at the program sites.

- In order to facilitate a better rate of class attendance, classes should be started in the morning at 8:30 instead of 8:00.

- Program organizers should explore the possibility and merits of providing a few days or weeks break between the spring semester and the beginning of the BTO Summer School program.

- There is need for better program planning and management by the program administrators with the full participation of the program staff at the various sites.

CONCLUSION

The research literature acknowledges poor academic performance as the single best predictor of students who drop out of school (Burchard et al, 1988, p.6). However, it is the feeling of helplessness and lack of confidence in one's ability to achieve good grades in school that often triggers the decision to drop out (Wehlage, Rutter, and Turnbaugh, 1987). Many believe that at the time when the feeling of helplessness sets in, certain symptomatic psychological states or attitudes become apparent. Such psychological states or attitudes include feelings of boredom, lack of interest in school, low self-esteem, and the perception of low teacher interest in one's well-being (Wehlage et al,1987; Opuni et al, 1989). The BTO staff description of the BTO Summer School students lends credence to the preceding observations. In a dropout study by Barr and Knowles (1986) 57% of the at-risk students studied were described as disinterested in and bored with school. Fortunately however, many researchers have indicated that schools can influence students' beliefs and attitudes as a vital first step (Wehlage et al,1987).

The program staff's perceptions of program strengths are supported by the positive improvements in student self esteem, appreciation of teachers, confidence in their abilities to better their grades, and determination to succeed in school (BTO Student Survey). If there were to be another BTO Summer School in 1991, then it would be pertinent to suggest that the program staff and the administrative coordinator of the program work collaboratively to address the problems that limited the efficiency of the 1990 BTO Summer program. However, it is known that the 1990 BTO Summer School will not be repeated in 1991. Other strategies should therefore be explored to strengthen the 1990-91 regular school year BTO program in order to address the following observation made by one of the BTO Summer teachers:

> *"[What I perceive to be a major weakness of the BTO Summer School is] the fact that this program cannot be continued for the students in high school. We identify these students and work with them one summer and then throw them to the wolves. How awful! "*

The question one needs to ask is "How can the changes in student attitudes, and the presumed academic improvements produced by the BTO Summer School be enhanced or sustained during the 1990-91 school year?" On the basis of the findings of the 1990 BTO Summer School and the strengths of similar programs across the nation, the following outline of suggestions are being made for the program staff and coordinators to reflect upon to determine merits and/or feasibilities.

Strengthening Bonds of Friendship and Support

The sense of family and emotional support that characterized the BTO Summer School could be continued in a number of ways. The social workers can work with the teachers who were in the program to set up student support groups at the sites selected for the 1990-91 BTO program, as well as schools with reasonable numbers of the 1990 BTO Summer School students. If stipends are provided for the teachers—to cover a few hours a month—and some incentives such as refreshments are supplied, the BTO Summer groups could be re-activated. The BTO Summer School teachers could act as the local campus contact persons for the groups, and will help direct students to appropriate sources of assistance to receive help. The BTO social workers and educational diagnosticians could collaborate to set up meetings for

students regularly to find out general problems they may need help resolving. Such support groups may help stabilize the students' emotional insecurities. With regards to their academic needs, students can be referred to other district programs that provide academic remediation such as the mentor tutoring program, Summer School program, Middle School Remedial Pilot Program, Senior High Remedial Pilot Program, or the Homework Hotline.

Incentive System

Students, parents, and BTO teachers and other staff can organize a few Saturday meetings during the year, when refreshments can be served and discussions of at-risk students needs and solutions can be initiated. Students and their parents could sign individual academic contracts for each semester that can earn the students Cool Bucks, which could be redeemed at a Cool Bucks Store. The signing of the contracts—as is practised by Hartford's Project Bridge—helps to indicate parental support and intention to meet the goals of the program. Students could be given Cool Bucks for attending the (a) support groups, (b) Saturday workshops, or (c) for receiving district provided academic assistance services such as RAP tutorials. Students who make much effort and improvement in their academic performance, attendance, and behavior could be given Cool Bucks. Financial contributions and specifically selected goods and services could be solicited from the business community to set up the Cool Bucks store. Students could be given transportation to the store twice or once a semester to redeem their coupons. Students could be given some incentives to help reclaim BTO students who drop out of the support groups. Additionally, as an incentive, students with good attendance and improvement in specified areas might be made eligible for pre-selected jobs within the community.

Some researchers have emphasized that the long term rewards or intrinsic values of education are not enough to motivate certain students to stay in school. According to Ellen Flax (1988), some students need more immediate rewards such as cash, part-time jobs, merchandise, or concert tickets. This explains why several schools across the nation are turning to money and redeemable coupons as the new motivator to keep potential dropouts in school. The following are examples of such efforts (Burchard and Berlund, 1988, pp. A-41-42).

- Hayward High School in Hayward, in California offers up rewards up to $250 for at-risk students who meet academic and attendance requirements.

- In Decartur, Illinois, up to $300, in coupons are awarded each quarter to at-risk students for completion of education related goals by both the student and the parents. The coupons are redeemable at local stores.

- Byck Elementary school, in Louisville, Kentucky, awards special checks redeemable at a K-Mart store located on the school's second floor as part of the consumer education program. All students who meet attendance, grading, and behavior requirements are eligible for the checks.

In conclusion, even though an assessment of The BTO Summer School's impact on the academic performance of BTO students was not conducted in this evaluation, the BTO Student Survey provides an indication that the program succeeded in improving student self esteem and other aspects of school that are vital to the improvement of academic performance. It is hoped that the 1990-91 BTO staff and administrators continue to work collaboratively to adopt or explore feasible activities that will help the at-risk students to enhance their academic performance and determination to stay in school.

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